

VZCZCXRO3477
OO RUEHDBU
DE RUEHMO #1315/01 2821054
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
O 091054Z OCT 06
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3629
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHMD/MOSCOW POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHMO/USDAO MOSCOW RS PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 011315

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/09/2016
TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [ETRD](#) [UNSC](#) [GG](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: RUSSIA-GEORGIA: NO LET-UP

Classified By: AMBASSADOR WILLIAM J. BURNS. Reason 1.4 (b, d)

Summary

¶1. (S) Russian officials continue to reject relaxation of economic sanctions. About 150 Georgians have been deported. Police document checks have intensified. Georgians here on work permits are seeking other citizenship. However, official actions in Moscow hit ethnic Georgian Russian citizens hardest. Ambassador has been pressing Russian officials on harassment of Georgians in Russia. DFM Karasin agreed October 9 this has gone too far and promised "greater restraint." First DFM Denisov repeated the same line in a separate conversation. Presidential Human Rights Advisor Pamfilova said October 9 that she is pushing the Kremlin to stop "silly and repressive measures." The Georgian Ambassador alleged Russia is pressing the Abkhaz to attack in Kodori. He asked for the U.S. position on Georgian defense of Kodori by a flanking attack through Gali. Given DefMin Ivanov's markers on the Russian response to a military "provocation," the result could be widespread conflict. The U.S. must be clear with the Russians, Georgians and Abkhaz to head off such actions. End Summary.

Russia Still Mad

¶2. (C) Russian officials continue to express anger at Georgia and to declare their intent to maintain economic sanctions. DefMin Ivanov has been most outspoken, warning publicly October 8 of a Russian military response should Georgia resort to "armed provocations" against Russian citizens in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. He said that Georgia represents a reincarnation of Cold War "client" or "proxy" states. He said it is up to Georgia to decide whether to join NATO, but made clear that Russia has no intention to "pay for this desire of the Georgian leadership" by sacrificing its own interests. He minimized current economic sanctions against Georgia, saying that if Russia wanted to impose a real blockade, it would use the model of the U.S. "blockade" of Cuba.

¶3. (C) Although Ivanov warned against a "witch hunt" against common Georgian citizens living in Russia, it is clear that police document checks have been intensified, including in places where Georgians are more likely to be found. About 150 Georgians have been deported, the Georgian Ambassador told us October 7 -- 100 of them with no papers, and 50 with papers that may have been acquired through corruption. Most controversial is the practice of combing school records to find the addresses of children with Georgian surnames, to check whether their parents are legally in Russia. One school administrator confirmed that the police had done so, despite police denials. Both Kremlin human rights chief Pamfilova and the NGO Memorial have publicly condemned the practice, and Pamfilova made the same points to the

Ambassador in an October 9 conversation.

14. (S) Ambassador's other conversations over the weekend (NODIS Septels) confirmed the hard line of senior Russian officials, and their intention to continue economic sanctions to ensure Georgia receives "not one kopek" from Russia. Ambassador separately pressed DFM Denisov and DFM Karasin October 9 on Russian harassment of Georgians living in Russia. Karasin agreed that the campaign has "gone too far," and said, "you will see greater restraint" from now on. Karasin reminded Ambassador that Abkhaz "Foreign Minister" Shamba is still waiting for permission to travel to New York to speak with UNSC members in the Aria forum (see comment below, para 8).

15. (C) Georgian Ambassador Chubinishvili told us October 7 that the weight of Russia's actions in Moscow hits hardest at Russian citizens of Georgian ethnicity. When we mentioned that we had confirmed that some of Moscow's most famous Georgian restaurants are closed -- Tiflis, Genatsvale and Pirosmeni (where President Clinton dined) -- Chubinishvili said the owners of these restaurants are Russian citizens -- "and very loyal to Russia, too." Chubinishvili cited several cases he knew of Russian citizens of Georgian ethnicity or born in Georgia who were denied papers such as automobile registrations, allegedly because of a policy against performing such services for ethnic Georgians. Nonetheless, he said, Georgians in Russia are protectively seeking Russian citizenship.

The Potential for Conflict

16. (S) Chubinishvili was more concerned about the potential

MOSCOW 00011315 002 OF 002

for military action. He claimed to have first-hand information from a recent meeting of senior GOR officials at which the MFA was severely criticized for its moderation towards Georgia. (DFM Denisov indirectly confirmed this to the Ambassador, saying that "Sergey (Lavrov) is in a very tough position right now.") At the meeting, management of the Abkhazia and South Ossetia issues was taken away from the MFA and given to the Russian Security Council.

17. (S) Chubinishvili also claimed that a friend with good contacts in the Abkhaz leadership quotes the Abkhaz as saying that the Russians are pushing them to attack the Upper Kodori Gorge later in the Autumn (once snows close the passes, Kodori is isolated from the rest of Georgia by road; weather often prevents helicopter access for weeks at a time as well). Chubinishvili worried that an attack on Kodori might coincide with an attack in South Ossetia as well. The Abkhaz are unhappy, Chubinishvili said, because they know the Georgians have good defenses in the Gorge, whose terrain makes it easy to defend. Whether the Abkhaz succeed or not, they will lose many troops. In addition, he said, the Abkhaz know that the Georgians might try to defend Kodori by launching a flanking attack to re-take Gali and lower Kodori.

We recalled that the U.S. has been absolutely clear with Georgia about the unacceptability of a Georgian offensive against Abkhazia. Chubinishvili replied that it is impossible to defend Kodori without the threat of such an attack, and requested that the USG make its position on this known to the Georgian Government as soon as possible.

Comment

18. (S) We need to caveat Chubinishvili's information, but the scenario he paints is realistic and worrisome. The Russians will be ready for a Georgian attack in Gali, and this would provide justification for a wider military campaign against Georgia. DefMin Ivanov's public and private comments make that clear. The ever more shrill press coverage and public statements (despite dissent from some sober voices) could

provide public support for military action. The U.S. needs to continue to be clear with both Russia and Georgia -- and the Abkhaz -- to avert fighting, preferably with the strong backing of our European allies.

-- With Russia, we need to stress that:

- -- The West considers Russia to have full control over Abkhaz forces, and to have full control as well over the presence of North Caucasus volunteers in Abkhazia; any such presence violates the 1994 Moscow Accords.

- -- The 1994 Accords make clear that Georgian civil authorities are to administer Upper Kodori, and as a result of the July police operation, Georgian civil authorities are doing just that. Any Abkhaz attempt to reverse the current situation without the intervention of the CIS PKF against the Abkhaz would result in a serious reconsideration by Western powers of their position on the legitimacy of the CIS PKF -- especially if there is no UNSCR renewing UNOMIG's mandate.

-- With Georgia, we need to make clear that the West will not countenance a Georgian attack, for whatever reason, on territory currently held by separatists. We understand the need to defend Kodori, but we also understand the temptation by some to manufacture an Abkhaz attack on Kodori in order to justify a Georgian attack on Gali, and Georgia will be on its own if it crosses the Enguri.

-- Abkhaz "Foreign Minister" Shamba should, in our view, be granted a visa immediately to visit New York, where U.S. officials can make clear that an Abkhaz attack on Kodori, using any justification, will have severe consequences for Abkhaz efforts at dialogue with western countries (including future visas for Abkhaz), for assistance programs within Abkhazia, and for western pressure on all Abkhaz trading partners.

BURNS